# Report on Vision Australia’s

# Strategic Planning Consultation Forums

## Introduction

A series of live and online forums were held to guide Vision Australia’s Strategic Planning process. More than 500 participants attended 15 consultation forums or responded online to a series of questions. The participant group was made up of:

* 38% clients
* 7% parents or caregivers
* 30% staff
* 13% volunteers
* 10% local community
* 2% other

Data was collected and the findings have helped help guide Vision Australia’s new strategic direction. A glossary of terms can be found at the end on this document.

The face-to-face and online forums focussed on the following questions:

1. What do you think are the top three social trends affecting Vision Australia and why?
2. Imagine three years down the track and Vision Australia is successful in this change. What will Vision Australia be doing? What would Vision Australia’s central purpose be? What would be different? What’s happened?
3. Consumers will be funded to buy services from us. What would you want to buy from Vision Australia and why? What couldn’t you do without? What would you be prepared to pay for?
4. What are the characteristics of great customer service?
5. What would Vision Australia have to be like on the inside to deliver that great service on the outside? (Note: participants were also asked to share stories of experiences of any great service they received in the past)

Overall, the participants reported a positive response to the consultation process, as it showed a real willingness on the part of Vision Australia to include clients and other relevant parties in ensuring that Vision Australia gets fit for the future.

## Methodology:

Participant’s responses to each question in the consultation forum were compiled and sorted into categories. These categories were then ranked to identify the top ten responses to each question. All response categories outside of the top ten were then compiled into an “other” category to accurately calculate the overall percentage of the answers to each question.

## Results:

The top five issues identified most frequently by participants in the consultation forums were:

1. **Accessible equipment** – Participants viewed accessible equipment as being the most important service that Vision Australia provides. And one that they would be happy to purchase under a consumer-directed model. Participants also told us that they want up-to-date information and service at a competitive price.
2. **Awareness of our services**– Participants felt that public awareness of the services that Vision Australia provides within the community is generally very low, which has directly contributed to a reduction in the number of clients being referred to the organisation.
3. **Community partnerships** –Consumer-directed funding and service models mean that Vision Australia has to develop purposeful partnerships with various allied health professionals and service providers. This would allow Vision Australia to remain competitive in a growing market, while also extending reach to rural and regional areas.
4. **Streamlined processes –** Participants said Vision Australia business processes were cumbersome, time-wasting and bureaucratic and had to be streamlined. This has a negative impact on the client experience. Excessive bureaucracy increased waiting times, making it difficult for clients to access and navigate the services available within Vision Australia.
5. **Client-focused -** participants in the forums felt that Vision Australia needs to adopt a client-focused approach that is based on clients’ needs rather than the limits of Vision Australia’s service capability.

### What do you see as the current social trends to which Vision Australia has to be responsive?

**Chart Key:**

**Consumer directed services -** a funding and service model that gives an individual control over decisions and choice over services

**Technology** - updating the technological resources available within Vision Australia in order to keep up with the rapid technological advances currently occurring

**Ageing population** - Australia’s population is ageing over time due to decreased birth rates. This will increase the number of people at risk of aged-related blindness and low vision.

**Social media** - use of online communication methods to provide accurate information on services

**Economy** – The instability within the Australian financial markets

**Health** - general physical or psychological condition

**Multiculturalism** - supporting the needs of people from different cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious and social backgrounds

**Social isolation** - separation resulting from a breakdown of community and family networks.

**Unemployment** - the incidence of people eligible for work but unable to find a job

**Political climate** - the churn of political change, such as election cycles, new policies and program funding

**Other** - refers to the spread of responses across a large number of other variables used in the analysis, including reporting requirements, education and client-focus

### *Consumer Directed Services*

When asked to consider the most important social trends to which Vision Australia responds, the most frequent response given was the introduction of Consumer directed services, which attracted 25 percent of total responses to this question. The National Disability Insurance Scheme and “Living Longer, Living Better” aged care reforms (among other consumer-driven models) will offer people with disability the opportunity to choose and purchase the supports they require, putting funding directly into the hands of the individual. Vision Australia will need to restructure its business model in order to adapt to this change and remain competitive in the market.

**What we heard:**

“Disability Care Australia – Will change the face of organisation. Vision Australia needs to be prepared to take it on” – **Participant, Cairns forum**

“The changes in government funding structures means consumers have more choice and more influence in the providers they choose” – **Participant, Kensington forum**

### *Technology*

Rapid advances seen in technology in recent years were the second most important trend identified by participants in the consultation forums, attracting 24 percent of all responses to this question. Stakeholders said it was important that the organisation stays in touch with the latest technological advances and train staff and clients to use new technology.

**What we heard:**

“Technology is constantly changing, and many new inventions are benefiting people who are blind. We need retain strong advocacy in this area” – **Staff member, VIC, aged 16-34 (Online forum)**

“Need to keep up to date & include technologically challenged sector eg. Older clients” – **Participant, Albury forum**

***Ageing population***

The third most important social trend identified by participants in the consultation forums was the ageing of Australia’s population, with 16 percent of the total responses to this question. Based on current estimates, the proportion of Australian’s aged over 65 is predicted to reach nearly 16.5 percent of the total population in 2015.[[1]](#footnote-1) Furthermore, there is a strong correlation between age and disability, as 40 percent of Australians aged 65-69 years old in 2009 reported having a disability.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Vision loss is increasingly more prevalent with age, as 65 percent of our current client base is comprised of people aged over 65. An increase in this demographic may have serious consequences for Vision Australia, as we currently receive minimal funding for clients aged over 65. Furthermore, according to the National Disability Insurance Scheme legislation a person meets the age requirement for the scheme if they are “aged under 65 when the access request in relation to the person was made.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

## What we heard:

“AGEING POPULATION - may result in increased vision loss within the community, particularly incidents of low vision and MD, which VA will need to be prepared for” – **Staff member, NSW, aged 35-64 (online forum)**

**“**We can all manage our own existence but people who are older/blind may have difficulty and need support” – **Participant, Canberra forum**

Other important social trends that participants regarded as significant include:

* increasing influence of social media
* economic downturn resulting from instability in the Australian financial markets
* the higher prevalence of health conditions, such as Diabetes, Macular Disease, mental health disorders and Dementia
* cultural differences resulting from the increased multiculturalism within Australia
* higher levels of unemployment, particularly amongst people who are blind or have low vision
* social isolation as a result of the breakdown of community and family networks
* churn of political change, such as election cycles, new policies and program funding

## What purpose has Vision Australia fulfilled to be successful in 3 years’ time?

**Chart key:**

**Awareness of our services**– public knowledge of the services Vision Australia provides

**Community partnerships** - Partnerships with other service providers, community groups and allied health practitioners to increase the number of referrals and clients coming into Vision Australia

**Communication** - clear and easily understood information available internally and externally over multiple channels

**Inclusive -** accommodating others’ points of view

**Expertise -** building a body of professional skill and knowledge that can be shared internally and externally

**Streamlined processes -** limit bureaucracy to make it easier for clients to access integrated services

**Decentralisation -** Making supports and services available outside urban centres to rural, regional and remote locations

**Blindness awareness -** increasing public awareness of the needs of people who are blind or have low vision

**Technology -** updating the technological resources available within Vision Australia in order to keep up with the rapid technological advances currently occurring

**Sound financial management -** sustainable and prudent practices of managing revenue and costs

**Other** - refers to the spread of responses across a large number of other variables used in the analysis, including accountability, cultural sensitivity, client-focused, peer support and income

### *Awareness of our services*

Participants said that a critical measurement of future success was an increase in public awareness of Vision Australia’s services, with over 18 percent of total responses to this question. Participants felt that the broader community does not have a good understanding of Vision Australia services, which has led to a reduction in the number of clients, referrals, and charitable donations.

**What we heard:**

“Unless VA can uplift its services through the local service centres, and improve awareness of services in the local community then there is no future” - **Client, VIC, aged 34-64 (online forum)**

“People are suffering in silence because they don’t know what services are available” – **Participant, Newcastle forum**

“Anyone at any stage of vision loss is aware and able to access our services. Referrals [made] to Vision Australia as the go to agency – whatever services someone needs we can help/ have it” – **Participant, Enfield forum**

### *Community Partnerships*

Key to raising a greater awareness of our services is the development of strong community partnerships. This was the second most reported purpose that Vision Australia will have fulfilled in three years’ time, attracting 15 percent of all responses. Partnerships with other service providers, community groups and allied health practitioners would increase the number of referrals and clients coming into Vision Australia. Furthermore, it would allow clients to obtain any services that Vision Australia cannot provide through a network of reputable service providers with strong links back to the organisation. This could be particularly beneficial for clients living in remote and regional areas.

**What we heard:**

“Partnerships with key health professionals to ensure appropriate referral pathways” – **Participant, Enfield forum**

“Link people with other groups doing things well – inclusion & outsourcing with community partnerships - focus on what we do well” - **Participant, Wollongong forum**

“If eye specialists are treating conditions they're less likely to refer to us plus some clients are less likely to have such significant vision impairments. But I think optometrists and ophthalmologists need to know that we assist clients in addition to any glasses or medical treatment they are receiving – **Staff member, aged 35-64 (online forum)**

### *Communication*

Participants in the consultation forums felt that communication within Vision Australia could be improved, attracting eight percent of total responses to this question. Better communication between departments is needed to promote cross unit collaboration and prevent departmental silos from developing. Participants also emphasised the need to strike a balance between utilising the latest communication mediums, while also accommodating the needs of clients who are older and/or less up-to-date with technology.

**What we heard:**

“Keep all stakeholders informed – especially information about access to services – make it easier to find information” – **Participant, Kooyong forum**

“Distributing current information pro-actively eg. SMS, emails to clients re – new apps, websites” – **Participant, Wollongong forum**

“Proactive cross-departmental communication” - **Participant, Coorparoo forum**

Other important purposes that participants felt Vision Australia must fulfil in three years’ time in order to be successful include:

* becoming a more inclusive organisation that accommodates other points of view
* building a body of expertise within Vision Australia and sharing it externally with other businesses and professionals
* streamlined processes within the organisation in order to limit bureaucracy and make it easier for clients to access the services they require
* decentralisation of offices from the larger metropolitan centres into smaller regional areas
* an increased awareness of the needs of people who are blind or have low vision within the community.
* updating the technological resources available within Vision Australia
* developing a sound financial management system that will make Vision Australia sustainable into the future.

## What do you want to buy from Vision Australia?

**Chart Key:**

**Accessible equipment** - technology that enables people who are blind or have low vision to operate effectively within the home, office and wider community

**Mobility services** – training in the use of different devices and Seeing Eye Dogs to increase the mobility of people who are blind or have low vision

**Technology training** - individualised training packages to assist people who are blind or have low vision in using accessible equipment

**Accessible information services -** provide access to accessible format material and information to people who are blind or have low vision

**Recreation services –** activities that provide the opportunity for clients to socially interact with others

**Occupational therapy** - services that increase independence within the home, office and broader community

**Personal care -** services that are delivered both within and outside the home environment, such as assistance with cleaning, lawn mowing and shopping

**Emotional support -** counselling services to help overcome the grief that often accompanies vision loss

**Eye health –** assessment through Vision Australia’s low vision clinics and referrals to specialists

**Transport -** assisting clients with getting to and from Vision Australia, as well as support travelling to and from specialist appointments

**Other** - refers to the spread of responses across a large number of other variables used in the analysis, including peer support, brokerage and case management, children’s services, employment services and advocacy and policy

### *Accessible equipment*

By far and away the most important service that participants said they would like to buy from Vision Australia is accessible equipment, such as computers, optical aids, braille displays and kitchen utensils, garnering 25 percent of overall responses. Alongside the equipment itself, participants highlighted the need for demonstrations and up-to-date advice and information on the latest available technology.

Many participants also suggested that they would like Vision Australia to recommend and develop accessible applications to use on smart phone technology.

In addition to purchasing accessible equipment and advice, the third most reported item was technology training. In particular, many participants expressed an interest in purchasing in-home installation and individualised training packages.

**What we heard:**

“Technology – limited training available. More courses needed including Google. Know what's available – communication – use of social media.” – **Participant, Enfield forum**

“Adaptive technology and training – because Vision Australia has the specialist knowledge” – **Participant, Coorparoo forum**

“Best/most current technology (person specific) – VA staff to inform/educate/train/provide follow up service thus becoming personal/client feeling individually serviced” – **Participant, Bendigo forum**

“iPhone apps – alert re new apps suitable for Vision Impaired” – **Participant, Albury forum**

### *Mobility services*

Mobility services are the second most important service that Vision Australia’s stakeholders would like to purchase, attracting ten percent of all responses to this question. This includes training with Seeing Eye Dogs, white canes and other orientation devices that increase independence in the home and the community.

**What we heard:**

“O & M including dogs are essential and I would pay a reasonable amount for such service” –**Client, VIC, aged 35-64 (online forum)**

“Assisting with mobility in the community – especially for the elderly” – **Participant, Newcastle forum**

### *Accessible information services*

Vision Australia’s accessible information services, including the production of information in alternative formats, were also highly valued by participants in the consultation forums, attracting nine percent of all responses to this question. While many would be willing to pay a fee to hire the equipment needed to play accessible books, many respondents expressed a reluctance to pay for membership fees, as public library services are often free. Furthermore, many felt that stronger networks should be established with local public libraries.

**What we heard:**

“Vision Australia caters well for the increasing numbers of vision-challenged baby boomers, with a huge range of materials/books etc available in a whole range of different media” – **Guardian of a client, VIC, aged 35-64 (online forum)**

“I would expect that library books to remain free of charge, but the players to be considered as equipment rental and charged accordingly” – **Staff member, VIC, aged 35-64 (online forum)**

“If the Library was to remain, our work with regional library corporations would be expanded so that they assist clients with downloading books. (This is already happening, but it would be nice to be able to stop defending our existence and use this energy to help clients.)” – **Staff member, VIC, aged 35-64 (online forum)**

### *Recreation*

Participants in the consultation forums would like to buy recreational services, attracting eight percent of all responses to this question. Recreational services of interest include social and sporting activities, technology training retreats, and day program activities.

Recreational services were of particular interest to participants in the Bendigo forums, suggesting that there is an increased demand for recreational and social opportunities within regional areas.

**What we heard:**

“A retreat where people can learn to use technology” – **Participant, Cairns forum**

“Recreation and social options – come and try sports/ join with others and family to go to places I can’t access.eg bushwalking” – **Participant, Geelong forum**

“Camps – learning of a vast range of skills, alongside other blind and low vision participants in a relaxed and informal fun setting” – **Participant, Kensington forum**

Other services that participants would buy from Vision Australia include:

* Occupational therapy services to increase independence within the home, office and broader community
* Personal care services that are delivered both within and outside the home environment, such as assistance with cleaning, lawn mowing and shopping
* Emotional support and counselling services to help clients overcome the grief that often accompanies vision loss
* Eye health assessments through the low vision clinics and referrals to specialists
* Transport services to assist clients with getting to and from Vision Australia, as well as support travelling to and from specialist appointments

### What would Vision Australia have to look like on the inside to deliver great service on the outside?

**Chart key:**

**Communication** - clear and easily understood information available internally and externally over multiple channels

**Streamlined processes -** limit bureaucracy to make it easier for clients to access integrated services

**Professional Development -** keeping qualifications and accreditation standards and developing new skills

**Staff and volunteers** - Vision Australia’s workforce which should be appropriately resourced

**Recognition** – staff are encouraged and recognised for a job well done

**Supportive -** a supportive work environment in which staff and clients work as a team with trust and respect

**Client-focused** - an approach based on clients’ choice and needs rather than Vision Australia’s service limits

**Leadership** - the ability to guide, direct and influence others effectively for the greater good

**Accountability** - staff take responsibility for their actions across all departments in Vision Australia

**Expertise** - building a body of professional skill and knowledge that can be shared internally and externally

**Other** - refers to the spread of responses across a large number of other variables used in the analysis, including office resources, innovation, decentralisation and sound financial management and awareness of our services

### *Communication*

Clear communication inside Vision Australia was at the top of the list, with 12 percent of all responses to this question. Enhanced communication would contribute to great service outcomes. Communication was also seen as being a key performance measure in determining whether Vision Australia could be judged as being successful in the future. These results suggest that improving communication within Vision Australia is of vital importance for the organisation moving into the future.

Communication was of particular concern to participants in the Newcastle forum. This may be due, in part, to the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme launch site within the region, highlighting a particular concern over the change in the way that Vision Australia delivers its services.

**What we heard:**

“Communication and connection in the organisation needs to be improved – lead us”

” – **Participant, Newcastle forum**

“Communication – across/between departments needs to be improved = frustration to clients” – **Participant, Enfield forum**

“Keep all stakeholders informed – especially information about access to services – make it easier to find information” – **Participant, Kooyong forum**

### *Streamlined processes*

Streamlined processes are another important factor in delivering great service, attracting 10 percent of all responses to this question. Participants felt that there was too much unnecessary bureaucracy within Vision Australia’s business processes. This excessive bureaucracy was thought to increase waiting times, while also making it difficult for clients to access and navigate services. Of particular concern was the intake process managed by the National Call Centre, which some regarded as overly complicated and intrusive. Similarly, many participants felt that a clear referral pathway to external specialists is required.

**What we heard:**

“I have had trouble with allied health staff at Vision Australia being too busy to assist me with paperwork around Better Start and I felt fobbed off and left out” – **Parent or guardian of a client, QLD, Aged 65 or over (online forum)**

“Improve the intake process. That is a client's first impression of VA and is usually a laborious experience. Information obtained through that process is often unreliable so the simpler the process the better” – **Staff member, aged 35-64 (online forum)**

“I feel there is too much paper work. The old saying Keep it Simple Stupid (KISS) needs to be incorporated in Vision Australia” - **Staff member, NSW, aged 35-64 (online forum)**

“Really defined referral pathway & streamlined processes” – **Participant, Coorparoo forum**

### *Professional Development*

Professional development of staff was also seen as a key to delivering great service, drawing nine percent of all participant responses to this question. A professional development program would increase the level of specialist knowledge within the organisation, directly benefiting our clients, and contribute to staff feeling more valued by management. Learning opportunities on the latest developments within specialist practice would also improve innovation.

**What we heard:**

“Specialist services increasing skills of staff, have/create evidence to support our work, more training, PD to staff re technology & rehab” – **Participant, Bendigo forum**

“Workforce development, this is a consideration for all organisations a resource to be used wisely - not just about the task performed, also the context and approach as that will contribute to positive experience for client and foster self-awareness and opportunity” – **Client, Vic, age unknown** **(online forum)**

“Upper management needs to appreciate/value staff & provide appropriate training” - **Client, Maroochydore forum**

Other characteristics that Vision Australia would need to embody to deliver great service include:

* Appropriate levels of staff within each office location
* Recognition of a job well done
* A supportive work environment in which staff and clients work as a team
* A client-focused approach to service delivery
* Effective leadership that guides, directs and influences others for the greater good.
* An increased level of accountability across all departments
* A high level of specialisation and expertise amongst staff

### What are the characteristics of great service?

**Chart Key:**

* **Client–focused** - a client-focused approach based on clients’ needs rather than Vision Australia’s service limits
* **Friendly** - a friendly approach – it all starts with a smile
* **Empathetic** - caring and genuine appreciation of clients’ needs
* **Knowledgeable** - an extensive knowledge of Vision Australia’s services and products
* **Timely** - reasonable response times taking account of needs and conditions
* **Listen to needs** - being really listened to and understood
* **Professional** - specialist service behaviour that is of a high standard
* **Flexible** - being prepared to be adaptable to situations and make issues-based decisions within boundaries
* **Going the “extra mile”** - doing everything possible to ensure that the client is satisfied.
* **Communication skills** - Clear communication of what services and products are available and required

Based on the feedback from the consultation forums, great service is chiefly defined by: a client-focused approach that places the needs of the client at the core of service planning; a friendly and welcoming attitude; and the ability to empathise with the position of others.

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1. Australian Bureau of Statistics, cat. No. 3235.0 Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Cat. No. 4102.0 Australian Social Trends, 2011  [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)